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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to examine the research on moral development for findings which could be applied to the design of programs to cultivate moral development in children and youth. The conclusion drawn from the examination of the research is that neither the dominant theoretical frameworks (e.g., Kohlberg's theory) nor the data that have been generated provide much useful guidance for the design of such programs. The narrowness of the current theoretical and empirical literature suggests the desirability of turning to the broader literature concerning personal self-regulation and the cultivation of positive human relations as a potential source of ideas and evidence. Examples of conceptual frameworks which might be heuristically useful are given, and types of intervention programs are illustrated which have been developed to deal with the more general issues of personal and interpersonal behavioral regulation. It is suggested that it may be valuable to study the potential applicability of established intervention approaches to specific problems of moral development. In addition, a list of questions is provided for which empirical answers would lend guidance in the design of effective programs for moral development. (Author/MP)

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Moral Development and Self-Regulation: What Do We Know--What Can We Do?[1]

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Moral development represents a fundamental issue and objective of both personal and social importance. A healthy, effective society requires that some order and coherence in relationships among people be established and maintained through shared values and rules of conduct. In a democracy, it is preferred that this be accomplished through personal self-regulation rather than coercive external controls. The cultivation of moral development as a means of promoting such personal self-regulation is an objective of both theoretical and social significance.

This study analyzed the research on moral development to (1) identify areas of weakness in the current approach to research, (2) identify existing empirical studies which could guide the design of programs to cultivate moral self-regulation in children and youth, and (3) identify future research topics which would fill gaps in existing knowledge relevant to social applications. Because Kohlberg's approach has dominated the study of moral development for the last two decades, it will be used as reference point and as a device for identifying the issues, problems and possibilities.

Subjects and Methods

The design and evaluation of programs to cultivate moral self-regulation requires: (1) a conceptual framework concerning the organization and development of relevant personality, behavioral, and environmental variables; (2) knowledge and methods with which relevant personality and behavioral development might be cultivated; and (3) knowledge and methods relevant to the design and evaluation of educational or behavioral intervention programs. Relevant studies of moral development from the past three decades were assembled and analyzed with regard to these issues. The studies used a diversity of samples of children and adults (e.g., Damon, 1977; Darley, Klosson, & Zana, 1978; Karniol, 1978; Kohlberg, Note 1; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970; Scnleiffer & Douglas, 1973; Weilman, Larkey, & Somerville, 1979; White, Bushnell, & Regnemer, 1978) in a

variety of countries (e.g., Edwards, Note 2; Gorsuch & Barnes, 1973; Kohlberg & Kramer, 1969; Salili, Maehr, & Gilmore, 1967; White, 1975). A comprehensive report of the results has been prepared (Sebes & Ford, Note 3). The present paper summarizes those findings most directly relevant to practical efforts to cultivate desired moral development.

Results and Conclusions

One conceptual framework, Kohlberg's stage model of moral reasoning, has dominated both research and the design of intervention efforts since the late 1950s. Three conclusions relevant to this framework appear to be supported by existing data: (1) there are multiple forms and content of moral reasoning used by every group studied; (2) normative forms used by groups vary from age to age; and (3) individuals vary in form and content of moral reasoning used at every age. One issue, however, raises serious questions about these conclusions. This is the fact that most of the data are a product of measurement procedures designed around Kohlberg's view (Kohlberg & Wasserman, 1980; Trainer, 1977; Urban, Note 4). Several authors have argued that Kohlberg's view appears to have a significant philosophical bias (Braun & Baribeau, 1978; Kohlberg, 1971; Levine, 1979), and others criticize this perspective on a series of other grounds (Alston, 1971; Braun & Baribeau, 1978; Kurtines & Grief, 1974; Meacham, 1975; Peters, 1971; Simpson, 1974; Trainer, 1977). These data, then, may be biased or distorted by the theory being used and its suggested methodology.

A review of the literature reveals several other serious limitations.

1. This framework does not focus on moral development and behavior, but only upon one aspect of cognitive functioning called moral reasoning (Blasi, 1980; Blatt & Kohlberg, 1975; Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg, Scharf, & Hickey, 1972; Rest & Kohlberg, 1963).

2. Little data have been generated concerning the relationship of moral

reasoning to other cognitive or behavioral variables important in moral development and behavior (Dell & Jurkovic, 1978; Gardner, 1973; Loevinger, 1966; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970; Sullivan, 1977).

3. The data contradict a stage conception of moral reasoning or development. Its usefulness for guiding research or intervention is doubtful (Garbarino & Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Haan, Smith, & Block, 1968; Kohlberg & Kramer, 1969; Lazarowitz, Stephen, & Friedman, 1976; Trainer, 1977).

4. A wider variety of form and content of moral reasoning may be potentially available at much younger ages than the Kohlberg model suggests (e.g., Darley, Klosson, & Zana, 1978; Eisenberg-Berg & Neal, 1979; Eisenberg-Berg & Roth, 1980; Karniol, 1978; Schleiffer & Douglas, 1973; Wellman, Larkey, & Somerville, 1979), and

5. Moral reasoning appears more heavily influenced by situational variability than the trait-like Kohlberg view suggests. For example, comparisons of different kinds of situations with different measures produces different kinds of information (Bode & Page, 1978; Davison & Robbins, 1978; Froming & McColgan, Note 5; Page & Bode, 1980; Tsujimoto & Nardi, 1978).

The theory and data found in the moral development literature, then, is too narrow for guiding the design of moral self-regulation intervention programs. Effective programs will require broader conceptual frameworks concerning individual development (cf. Ford, Note 6; Lerner, 1978; Riegel, 1976). Cultivating moral self-regulation requires knowledge of its relationship to affective, interpersonal, cognitive, and psychosocial development. Kohlberg (Blatt & Kohlberg, 1975) as well as others (Bessell & Palomares, 1969, 1973; Casteel & Doyle, 1974; Combs & Slaby, 1977; Dinkmeyer, 1970; Kanfer & Karoly, 1972; Miller, 1976) have attempted to develop programs to cultivate aspects of moral behavior often under the labels of self-concept, values clarification, confluent education, interpersonal problem-solving, etc. Within these programs,

there are varying levels of skills training and practice in dealing with problem situations. Though some of these programs (e.g., Goldstein, et al., 1980; Kirschenbaum & Ordman, 1981) attempt to view the child's total functioning, most fall short of an integrated approach to the multiple facets of moral development and behavior (though admittedly the teaching of moral development per se is not the goal of some of them.)

Another problem with current program design is the failure in most if not all of the currently used intervention programs to view moral reasoning and behavior from a truly developmental framework. This problem, as it relates to Kohlberg's work, became evident through a series of studies which indicated that even young children can exhibit a wide variety of moral reasoning rules if the experimenter knows "how to tap them" (Darley, Klosson, & Zana, 1978; Karniol, 1978; Karniol & Ross, 1979; Schleiffer & Douglas, 1973).

Efforts to study and exploit developmental differences are not evident in the programs mentioned previously nor in the study and training of moral reasoning behavior in children. In preparing a chapter on the promotion of social development in children, Furman (1980) reviewed all the volumes of two behavioral journals, Behavior Therapy and The Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, and was unable to find even one study which examined the effectiveness of a behavioral program with children of different ages, and less than 25% of the full-length studies of children even mentioned developmental factors. A careful examination of the developmental literature can provide important, empirically derived questions for research as well as guidelines for programming. A broader conceptual approach would allow us to add to this by placing a similar emphasis on the need to look at various sytems of functioning (e.g., development of personality, moral reasoning, cognition, etc.) and the interrelated, often interdependent, hierarchies of skill levels which compose these.

The broader literature concerning individual development and functioning provides some guidance both for research and practical programs. Some research questions relevant to applications are: How is moral reasoning related to moral behavior at different age levels? Is there more than one sequence of moral development? Is moral behavior guided by different forms and content of moral reasoning at different ages? How can moral behavior be made less situation specific? Are there "developmentally efficient" ways of teaching and studying moral reasoning and behavior at different ages? Some research (e.g., Darley, Klosson, & Zanna, 1978; Karniol, 1978) illustrates the potential value of addressing such questions. Another area which would add substantially to the pursuit of better programming is better evaluation of educational or behavioral moral development programs in general.

The oft-noted "murkiness" in the outcome evaluation literature (Borkovec & Bauer, 1980; Frank, 1979) is seen as resulting from problems inherent in quasi-experimental designs in general (Campbell & Stanley, 1963), such as: lack of a clear-cut picture as to "who has improved" and why; arbitrary relationships between program "process" and measurement instruments; unclear specification of program components; and lack of cohesive feedback to facilitate program improvement (Urban, Note 4). Along these lines, only a few studies coming from the Kohlbergian framework have been longitudinal (Damon, 1977; Kohlberg, 1973; Kuhn, 1976), and few if any of these have purposely studied the effects of "intervention" into the natural development of moral reasoning.

Generalizability from the training context to other contexts is also important, given the situation-specific characteristics of moral reasoning and behavior suggested by the literature (Eisenberg-Berg, 1979). The importance of behavioral changes in one setting are not to be minimized. However, the cultivation of generalized behavior, such as moral self-regulation, requires specific efforts to cultivate the transfer of such changes to other real-life

settings (Goldstein & Kanfer, 1979).

The media used to present the moral dilemmas is also an important consideration in program design. Gardner (1979) observes that the kinds of media materials or "symbol system" used to present a situation may produce different kinds of responses. He and Santostefano (1980) cite evidence of how different stimulus materials and different behavioral modes (e.g., action, fantasy, or language) may interact developmentally. For example, moral dilemmas presented as movies may produce different results than those presented as written stories, and the effects may further vary with age.

In facilitating the resolution of the above-noted problems, a number of factors should be considered. In regards to the first problem (i.e., the narrowness of the present approach), there are several guides for future researchers:

1. Experiment with broader frameworks which incorporate the total functioning of the child (e.g., Ford, Note 6; Lerner, 1978; Riegel, 1976), and

2. Use these approaches to develop research questions which attempt to tie together the various sytems of development.

The second related problem, that of the construction of a truly developmental approach to program design, can be achieved by:

1. Consulting the developmental literature and trying to get a firm grasp on how the cognitive, affective, psychosocial, physical, and self-regulatory systems develop and attempt to delineate a multiple system hierarchy.

2. Taking a normative approach. This allows one to specify the intervention and assessment approaches that would be most effective with different developmental groups in different realms of functioning.

3. Using a developmentally based selection of target behaviors. For example, in a program for pre-schoolers, it would not make sense to focus on social role-taking until the child has the cognitive ability to do so. A more

basic step, such as the exploration of feelings and facial expressions may be more relevant, And

4. Taking a social validational approach. Both the importance of a general class of behaviors and the behavioral components will vary developmentally. Social interactions with the opposite sex, for example, change markedly both in the behavioral components involved and in the importance of such interchanges. In fact, the values children ascribe to different social acts change developmentally (Emmerich, 1968). Judges of behavior as well as trainers and program developers, then, need to be familiar with the subtle developmental nuances in order to accurately assess and improve functioning.

The problem with program evaluation can be addressed through:

1. The use of carefully controlled experimental designs, and the creative use of "different" or novel perspectives when designing experiments.

2. Clearer specification of the components of each program being tested.

3. Clearer specification of the desired outcomes--what constitutes a "successful" program, and

4. A more concise manner of determining if the program has met its goal and if not, what needs to be changed.

A useful model for program evaluation which incorporates these suggestions has been proposed by Urban (Note 4).

Several methods to remedy the problem of generalizability to other treatment settings have been offered by Goldstein and Kanfer (1979). Some of these are:

1. The provision of general principles. These include studies of labeling, rules, mediated generalizations, advance organizers, learning sets, etc.

2. The maximization of identical elements. In the context of skills training, the principles of identical elements could be implemented by procedures which function to increase the "real-lifeness" of the stimuli (people, behaviors, places, events, etc.) to which the trainer is helping the trainee to react with

appropriate responses.

3. The maximization of response availability. The notion that the more we have practiced (especially correctly) responses, the easier it will be to call them forth in later contexts or at a later time.

4. Maximizing stimulus variability. Exposing trainees to a wide range of stimuli to which they must practice responding.

In terms of moral development training, these steps mean: (1) helping the developing child recognize and label the rules they have used, teaching them about the "stages" and what they involve, and walking them through ways of thinking about the dilemmas; (2) personalizing the training for the child and helping the child see the similarities and differences among the dilemmas presented; (3) the repeated practice of the skills through various age-appropriate behavioral techniques such as role-playing, covert and overt rehearsal, etc., as well as the use of a wide range of audio-visual aids to represent child models solving the dilemmas in various ways while thinking aloud; (5) giving homework assignments and encouraging practice at home; and (6) having the teachers and children generate dilemmas of their own to respond to.

In sum, the social desirability and value of moral self-regulation is great. Efforts to elaborate basic knowledge about such processes should be significantly broadened (e.g., research from different perspectives, efforts to identify developmentally-based abilities and limits, efforts to relate the various systems of development, etc.). In addition, efforts to design and/or evaluate programs attempting to cultivate prosocial moral development as well as its interrelated components or counterparts (e.g., affective education, etc.) should be encouraged. Each stream of effort could feed and stimulate the other. If psychology could attempt to use the guidelines provided in developing improvements in understanding and cultivating prosocial moral behavior, we could forego the use of coercive, external regulation and work to cultivate a truly open and free democratic society.

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